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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Chapter I
Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141 and focuses on developments since the sixty-first session of the Assembly, including in relation to implementation of the Plan of Action and the Strategic Management Plan (2006-2007) of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the institution-building phase of the Human Rights Council and treaty body reform. The report should be read in the context of my report submitted earlier this year to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/4/49).

Chapter II

Institution-building of the Human Rights Council, universal periodic review and review of mandates and mechanisms

2. On 18 June 2007, one year after its inaugural meeting, the Human Rights Council, established by the General Assembly in resolution 60/251, reached a landmark agreement in relation to its institution-building which provides it with a structured and predictable framework for its future work in protecting and promoting human rights. As a result of a considerably labour-intensive year, the Council made significant progress in translating into reality the unanimous commitment made by Heads of State and Government at the 2005 World Summit. Throughout this period, my Office was engaged in providing strong and efficient support to the Council, its President and its Bureau, and will continue to do so as the Council now embarks on implementing the decisions taken.

3. In my report to the Human Rights Council, I expressed confidence that the mechanism of universal periodic review, which constitutes one of the main pillars of the new Human Rights Council architecture, would develop into a significant, constructive and highly visible activity of the Council. The universal periodic review represents an essential step in ensuring a universal application of human rights whereby all States Members of the United Nations are reviewed in the same manner. As devised by the Council, it is intended to address each situation impartially and on the basis of universal and equal parameters and applicable standards. It is to be a constructive process which avoids politicization and exaggeration of discussion. The universal periodic review will therefore constitute one of the key tools which will enable the Council to be in a position to move beyond the criticisms that were directed against the activities of its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights.

4. I was also pleased to register during the past year in the Council's institution-building phase that it responded positively to requests for a broadening of the sources of information upon which the universal periodic review process will be based. Hence, in addition to information provided by the Member State concerned, my Office is requested to prepare a compilation of information contained in relevant United Nations documents, while a summary of additional credible and reliable information from other stakeholders would also be considered. This is critical for ensuring that the universal periodic review becomes an inclusive process involving all stakeholders. My Office stands ready to contribute in a comprehensive manner to this process; significant additional resources will be needed for that purpose.

5. The general agreement and common understanding reached on the institution-building package is that the universal periodic review mechanism does not duplicate existing mechanisms and reporting obligations. Therefore, one of the challenges identified for the implementation of the universal periodic review in a meaningful manner will be to promote its universality and uniqueness, while ensuring its consistency, coherence and complementarity with other existing human rights mechanisms and processes.

6. Much thought is currently being devoted to the possible modalities of the processes and functioning of the universal periodic review mechanism. It is my firm belief that the modalities should lead to an effective and transparent mechanism conducive to open, constructive and comprehensive dialogue with States addressing

the full range of rights: civil, cultural, economic, political and social. Attention is currently being given to the drafting of appropriate general guidelines for the preparation of national reports, which should establish broad and efficient, while realistic, modalities for the preparation of reports submitted under the universal periodic review. My Office will continue to provide support in these various endeavours with a view to ensuring that the universal periodic review process is as meaningful and effective as possible.

7. While strong structures are important, the major factor by which the effectiveness of the universal periodic review will be evaluated will be the political willingness of States to engage meaningfully in the universal periodic review process. The credibility of the Council is very closely tied to success in the implementation of the universal periodic review. I therefore call on Member States to engage fully in the universal periodic review process and to give the necessary follow-up at the national level to the outcomes of the review to ensure the effective protection and implementation of human rights.

8. I welcome the establishment of the Human Rights Council Advisory Committee, which replaces the former Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. Functioning as a think tank, notably on neglected or underdeveloped thematic issues, the 18-member Committee is expected to provide expertise and advice and to conduct substantive research and studies on thematic issues of interest to the Council, at its request. In the performance of its mandate, I encourage the Advisory Committee to establish strong interaction with States, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and other entities of civil society.

9. I also welcome the fact that, after intensive review of the special procedures system developed over many years by the former Commission on Human Rights, the Council has reaffirmed the special role of the special procedures and their key features, in particular their central characteristic and prerequisite of credibility and independence. The main activities of the special procedures will continue, including country visits, thematic studies and direct communications with Governments concerning individual cases of human rights violations. The review of individual mandates, to take place over the next year, presents an important opportunity to identify and close protection gaps in the special procedures system and I will continue to encourage the Council to seize this opportunity to further develop the system in order to maximize necessary protection coverage. The special procedures system, being based on cooperation and dialogue with States, depends for its effectiveness on their cooperation. I accordingly call on all States to deepen their cooperation with the special procedures, notably by regularly extending invitations, in particular standing invitations, to mandate-holders.

10. I further welcome the establishment of a new complaints procedure to address consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of all human rights and fundamental freedoms occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances. While the confidential 1503 procedure served as a working basis, I note with satisfaction that a more victim-oriented procedure with greater participation of the complainant in the overall process has emerged from the Council's deliberations. One unresolved issue, however, is the protection gap which now seems to exist owing to the expiry of the mandate of the Working Group on Communications on 18 June 2007. I am pleased to note that the Council is currently

studying the matter in depth with a view to overcoming this difficulty at an early opportunity.

11. As I have mentioned on various occasions, one of the new features of the Council compared to its predecessor is its quasi-standing nature. The ability for the Council to meet frequently, in various capacities throughout the year, has introduced significant changes to the working culture surrounding it. In tandem with the new universal periodic review mechanism, this feature should ensure that no human rights crisis or emerging trend will remain unattended or unstudied. The new Council architecture as it currently stands will thus promote a more dynamic and efficient consideration of all human rights matters, whatever their scope or nature. It should be noted that this quasi-permanency of sitting of the Council has clearly had an impact on delegations, particularly those of small States and of civil society, in meeting the demands of the now envisaged approximately 34 weeks of meetings per year. Solutions are being explored and efforts should be made by all concerned to ensure that the international community as a whole is in a position to contribute to the work of the Council and that, in turn, its deliberations benefit all its constituents.

Chapter III
Strengthening country engagement

12. In line with the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly, entitled "In larger freedom: towards development, security and human rights for all" (A/59/2005), and with my own plan of action, OHCHR intensified its country engagement over the reporting period as one of the main tools for promoting the implementation of human rights. To this end, OHCHR focused on the consolidation of existing field offices and the establishment of new offices, as well as on strengthening partnerships at the global, regional and country levels.

A. Headquarters capacity to support country engagement

1. Strengthening of the Rapid Response Unit

13. Within the Capacity-building and Field Operations Branch, which supports country engagement, the Rapid Response Unit has been stepping up its efforts to ensure a timely and systematic response to human rights crises requiring urgent action. During the first half of 2007, the Office provided assistance with regard to the planning, design and work of the High Level Fact-Finding Mission for Beit Hanoun and of the Expert Group on Darfur, both mandated by the Human Rights Council. OHCHR also participated in joint United Nations technical assessment missions to Chad, the Central African Republic, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, three missions were dispatched to Guinea to support the United Nations country team and, in particular, to provide assistance to civil society to independently investigate and report on the grave human rights violations committed in January and February 2007 during the repression of a popular movement prompted by the general strike of 10 January. OHCHR also initiated projects aimed at providing methodological and operational guidance. In this context, draft general guidance on international human rights commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions has been prepared and a workshop was organized in June 2006 with the participation of international experts to collect lessons learned and review the draft text of the guidance, which will be finalized for internal use before the end of 2007.

14. The Rapid Response Unit worked on further developing the preparedness capacity of OHCHR with respect to human, financial and operational resources and, in this regard, an internal rapid deployment roster of selected OHCHR staff was established.

2. Support to national human rights institutions

15. In compliance with the Principles relating to the status of national institutions, "the Paris Principles" (General Assembly resolution 48/134, annex), national human rights institutions are a key component of effective national human rights protection systems and indispensable actors for the sustainable promotion and protection of human rights at the country level. Over the reporting period, OHCHR has continued to support national human rights institutions, including through enhancing cooperation with their regional coordinating bodies and with the International Coordination Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and its newly established bureau. OHCHR has also continued to

provide advice on the establishment or strengthening of national human rights institutions. Detailed information on activities undertaken by OHCHR with respect to national human rights institutions can be found in the Secretary-General's reports to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/4/91 of 8 February 2007) and to the General Assembly at its current session.

B. OHCHR presence in the field

1. OHCHR presence at the country level

16. Since the submission of my previous report to the General Assembly (A/61/36), OHCHR presence in the field has continued to develop, with the opening of a country office in Togo in November 2006 and the ongoing preparations for the establishment of a country office in Bolivia following the signature of a host country agreement with the Government of Bolivia in February 2007. This host country agreement was ratified by the Bolivian Congress and endorsed by Presidential Decree in July 2007, and the office should be fully operational by the end of 2007. OHCHR offices in Nepal, Cambodia, Uganda, Angola, Guatemala, Colombia, Mexico and the Occupied Palestinian Territory have remained actively engaged with the situations there and have received significant cooperation from national counterparts to address critical human rights issues.

17. In Nepal, OHCHR continues to monitor the human rights situation throughout the country, including in the Terai region where tension has been continuing, in particular since January 2007. Combating impunity for past and ongoing human rights violations remains essential for a successful transition and genuine commitment to achieving this goal is required from all parties.

18. In Uganda, OHCHR is pursuing an ongoing, constructive dialogue with the Government and the security sector for the prevention of human rights violations. Following fact-finding missions in the north-eastern Karamoja region, where disarmament operations have had a negative impact on the human rights situation, OHCHR Uganda issued two public reports (in November 2006 and April 2007), providing a concrete basis for dialogue with relevant parties and for follow-up action. I am pleased to report recent significant improvements in the situation in Karamoja due to changes in policy and practice on the ground by the Ugandan security forces. I welcome the agreement of the Government of Uganda in July to renew its memorandum of understanding with OHCHR, which demonstrates its willingness to continue its collaboration with my Office and to improve the human rights situation in the country.

19. On 9 September 2007, I will sign an agreement with the Government of Colombia to renew the mandate of OHCHR in the country for three years. In Cambodia, OHCHR is continuing consultations with the Government on the memorandum of understanding concerning the activities of the Office in that country.

20. In December 2006, OHCHR closed its technical cooperation office in Skopje. In June 2007, after 10 years of active engagement, OHCHR closed its country offices in Sarajevo and Belgrade. We will however remain engaged in the region, mainly in Kosovo, where we are in the process of strengthening our presence in the light of persisting human rights concerns and the major challenges ahead.

2. Progress in the establishment of new regional offices

21. OHCHR regional offices have a key role to play in facilitating the development and implementation of regional engagement strategies through multi-tiered partnerships, as they allow OHCHR to engage directly with Governments and other relevant national counterparts, as well as regional and subregional organizations and United Nations country teams. My Office has experienced considerable delays concerning the establishment of new regional offices foreseen in my strategic management plan for 2006-2007. This has been due to inherent complexities in such a process, including the selection of the site of regional offices, finalization of agreement on the memorandum of understanding with the host country and, in some cases, logistical and staffing challenges.

22. In February 2007, I signed a host country agreement with the Government of Panama for the opening of the OHCHR Regional Office for Central America. Progress has also been achieved with regard to the establishment of a regional office for West Africa in Dakar following the receipt of a letter in February 2007 from the Government of Senegal expressing its approval for such an office. It is expected that both regional offices will be fully staffed and operational by the end of 2007.

23. There have also been advances towards the establishment of a regional office for Central Asia. I would like to thank the Government of Kyrgyzstan for its willingness to host the regional office and I anticipate that the necessary legal agreement can be finalized soon. As requested by the General Assembly in its resolution 60/153, consultations are continuing with the Government of Qatar on the establishment of a United Nations human rights training and documentation centre for South-West Asia and the Arab region.

24. Regarding the establishment of a regional office for northern Africa, after months of consultations, the Government of Egypt informed my Office at the end of July 2007 that it considered it appropriate to give other Arab capitals the opportunity to host the regional office. I am thus considering alternative locations for it.

25. Lastly, OHCHR is envisaging the establishment of a regional office for South and West Asia and has been conducting consultations regarding its possible location.

26. In cooperation with the Office of Legal Affairs, OHCHR has worked on the harmonization of host country agreements (in line with General Assembly resolution 48/141) in order to provide an even, strong and consistent legal foundation for cooperation and dialogue across the full scope of the mandate of OHCHR.

3. Enhancing dialogue through country visits

27. My country visits are also an important means of strengthening country engagement, allowing for a more direct dialogue with counterparts, including with highest-level Government representatives and rights-holders. A common message in all my missions is the need for accountability with a view to ending oft-prevailing impunity for all forms of human rights violations. This was the case during my follow-up mission to Nepal in January 2007, as well as in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Burundi and Rwanda, which I visited in May 2007. During the latter mission, I placed very strong emphasis on the urgent need to fight impunity for the gross and widespread sexual violence against women.

28. In April/May 2007, I visited Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, where I had the opportunity to meet with the highest authorities, representatives of United Nations and regional organizations, civil society groups and locally-based diplomatic representatives. I was particularly encouraged by the support of the Governments and civil society for the establishment of an OHCHR regional office in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. I was also pleased to visit Indonesia in July 2007 and discuss with the Government strengthened cooperation with OHCHR at the national, regional and international levels.

C. Partnerships within the United Nations

1. Increased engagement with and support to peace missions

29. Throughout the reporting period, OHCHR provided increased support and advice to ensure that the human rights components of 17 peace missions comprehensively carry out the "core human rights functions" set out in the Secretary-General's Policy Committee's decision 2005/24 on human rights in integrated missions. OHCHR also continues to participate actively in the integrated mission planning process and has been involved in joint United Nations technical assessment missions in Sierra Leone, Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Chad and Liberia.

30. I underscore the importance of regular public reporting, including thematic reporting, by human rights components of peace missions, which is highlighted in the Secretary-General's decision as a crucial routine activity of human rights components. To ensure a consistent approach to this key function, my Office has started consultations with partners to develop guidelines on public reporting by human rights components of peace missions.

31. OHCHR contributed to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations policy directives on gender equality, reform of law enforcement agencies and use of formed police units. It also continued to collaborate with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on the development of training materials, in particular for the United Nations police, and is working with it to develop guidance tools on the human rights responsibilities and role of military personnel of peace operations.

32. The annual meeting of the heads of human rights components of United Nations peace missions, held in New York from 4 to 6 December 2006 and, for the first time, jointly hosted by OHCHR, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs provided an opportunity to review progress in the implementation of the Secretary-General's decision and to strengthen interdepartmental collaboration at United Nations Headquarters, as well as between the human rights and military components of peace missions. Following the meeting, the joint Department of Peacekeeping Operations/OHCHR action plan for the implementation of the decision of the Secretary-General's Policy Committee was revised and updated.

2. Stepping up cooperation with humanitarian actors

33. In 2007, OHCHR further contributed to humanitarian coordinating mechanisms at the global and field levels. In particular, it is an active member of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, including through leadership of the Committee's newly established Reference Group on Human Rights and Humanitarian Action and participation in the work of the Cluster Working Group on Protection. OHCHR also actively participates in the inter-agency protection capacity project which manages a roster of senior experts and aims at enhancing the protection response in humanitarian crises.

34. Through regular participation in inter-agency initiatives, OHCHR has contributed to the development of guidance material, adding a human rights perspective to a number of documents, including the *Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action*, the *Inter-agency Handbook for the Protection of Internally Displaced Persons* and the induction training package for humanitarian coordinators. Furthermore, OHCHR is coordinating the contributions of various agencies to develop a standard framework for strategic planning, as well as a checklist on a human rights-based approach to programming for humanitarian actors.

35. At the field level, OHCHR works closely with humanitarian partners and increased coordination has been achieved in a number of operations, such as in Afghanistan, Lebanon, the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Somalia. Efforts to mainstream human rights into humanitarian assistance in the aftermath of natural disasters continued with the organization in May 2007 by the OHCHR Regional Office for the Pacific in Suva, Fiji, of a regional workshop on integrating human rights in natural disaster management in the Pacific.

3. Improving partnerships with the United Nations Resident Coordinator system

36. Effective integration of human rights into the policies and operations of the United Nations system at large, particularly at the country level, is crucial for enhancing direct engagement and dialogue with countries on human rights challenges and for ensuring a coherent response from the United Nations system. The Secretary-General's High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the Areas of Development, Humanitarian Assistance and the Environment had called upon OHCHR to provide dedicated support to the Resident Coordinator system and United Nations country teams.

37. For many years, OHCHR has been placing priority emphasis on partnerships within the United Nations system, particularly at the country level. In 2007, 27 country teams were granted support under the "Action 2" programme from a human rights adviser to be deployed by OHCHR in close cooperation with the respective Resident Coordinators.

38. In 2007, at the request of Resident Coordinators and United Nations country teams, human rights advisers were deployed in six countries (Ecuador, Guyana, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, Indonesia and Maldives), in addition to those already in Sri Lanka, Pakistan (deployed following the October 2005 earthquake) and Somalia. Furthermore, national human rights programme officers are working with country teams in Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation, while a national human rights programme officer has been supporting the country team in the former Yugoslav

Republic of Macedonia since January 2007. Steps have been taken to deploy several additional human rights advisers by the end of 2007, including in the context of "Action 2".

39. OHCHR continues its efforts to standardize the basic conditions and operating procedures for such deployments, in line with the mandate and objectives of the Office.

Chapter IV
Developments in strategic thematic areas

A. Equality and non-discrimination

40. The struggle against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance and the effective implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action[1] remain a key priority for my Office. OHCHR continues to extend substantive and organizational support to the mechanisms established in the follow-up to the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, namely the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Effective Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, and the Group of Independent Eminent Experts on the Implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action. My Office has identified and recruited experts of high reputation in their respective fields of competence to serve as panellists for the various thematic issues these bodies have considered in the implementation of their mandates.

41. OHCHR is also providing strong support to the preparatory process leading to the convening in 2009 of a review conference on the implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 61/149. The first organizational session of the Preparatory Committee for the Durban Review Conference will be held in Geneva in August 2007.

42. My Office has also engaged in an active dialogue with African national human rights institutions to identify how OHCHR might be able to advise and assist them in their anti-discrimination efforts. To this end, a meeting was held with senior representatives of 17 national institutions during the 39th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in Banjul in May 2006. In November, OHCHR organized in Banjul a seminar on the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action for participants in the NGO Forum organized in the framework of the 40th regular session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. Building upon the success of these dialogues, my Office plans to replicate them in other places. The work is also interlinked with OHCHR efforts on minority and indigenous issues.

B. Development, poverty reduction and the Millennium Development Goals

43. My Office is strengthening its capacities and expertise in the areas of the right to development and the Millennium Development Goals in order to support Member States more effectively in making the right to development a reality in practice. OHCHR is supporting the High-Level Task Force on the Implementation of the Right to Development and the open-ended Working Group on the Right to Development in commissioning studies and undertaking field missions to pilot a set of criteria for the periodic evaluation of global development partnerships with a

[1] See *Report of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, Durban, 31 August-8 September 2001* (A/CONF.189/129 and Corr.1), chap. I.

view to progressively refining them, in accordance with Human Rights Council resolution 4/4.

44. The questions of how human rights can influence macroeconomic policymaking processes and how economic policies affect human rights are fundamental. In this context, OHCHR organized an expert consultation on 9 and 10 July 2007 towards the elaboration of guidelines on the design and implementation of external debt and economic reform policies consistent with economic, social and cultural rights, drafted by the independent expert on the effects of economic reform policies and foreign debt on the full enjoyment of human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights.

45. Consistent with the World Summit Outcome (General Assembly resolution 60/1) and the Secretary-General's decisions on "Delivering as one", the report of the High-level Panel on System-Wide Coherence, my Office continues to explore deeper thematic and operational partnerships with development agencies in the United Nations system. OHCHR has scaled up its engagement at both the policy level and the country level in connection with the "Delivering as one" initiative, with a view to ensuring that human rights standards and principles are integrated as far as possible into "Delivering as one" pilot initiatives. The "Action 2" inter-agency programme refocused its work in 2007 to dedicate increased resources to capacity development and the placement of human rights advisers at the request of Resident Coordinators in "Delivering as one" pilot countries, to further the linkages between the United Nations normative and operational agendas. The "Action 2" programme began to deliver on its original promise in 2007, with 40 countries benefiting from support.

46. A landmark common learning package on a human rights-based approach was finalized with our United Nations partners in 2006, and a training of trainers programme developed with the United Nations System Staff College in 2007 resulted in an expanded roster of inter-agency resource people capable of delivering the common learning package to common country assessment/United Nations Development Assistance Framework roll-out countries. Bilateral dialogue continued with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in 2007 on issues relating to the right to development, poverty, the Millennium Development Goals and accountability for socio-economic rights, and likewise with other important partners, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

47. Building on conceptual work begun in 2002, OHCHR published Principles and Guidelines for a Human Rights Approach to Poverty Reduction Strategies in October 2006. The guidelines are intended as a tool to assist countries, international agencies and development practitioners to translate human rights norms, standards and principles into policies and strategies in favour of the poor.

48. Two significant publications are scheduled for completion in 2007, namely, a joint OHCHR/WHO toolkit on health, human rights and poverty reduction strategies, a resource designed principally for public health practitioners and policymakers, and an OHCHR publication on the Millennium Development Goals and human rights, intended as a tool for development policymakers and human rights practitioners alike. The Office is also planning to issue in September 2007, jointly with the Millennium Campaign, a pamphlet on the Millennium Development

Goals and human rights, an important communications tool for advocating a human rights-based approach to efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

49. Alongside these efforts, I highlighted "poverty and human rights" as the theme for last year's Human Rights Day on 10 December. I took the opportunity provided by the visibility of that occasion to reinforce the message that poverty is the gravest human rights violation, and will continue doing so as part of an ongoing communications and outreach effort.

C. Economic, social and cultural rights

50. My Office is continuing its efforts to strengthen its expert capacity in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, with a focus on legal protection and advocacy. Pursuant to Human Rights Council decision 2/104, my Office has undertaken a comprehensive study on the right to water (A/HRC/6/3). The study sets out human rights obligations relating to equitable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, and a range of issues requiring further consideration. OHCHR organized an open consultation on the issue on 11 May 2007.

51. As part of my objective of providing leadership and advocacy in the area of economic, social and cultural rights, my annual report to the Economic and Social Council in 2007 (E/2007/82) focuses on progressive realization of these rights. My Office is finalizing the publication of a fact sheet on the right to health and of a handbook on housing and property restitution for refugees and displaced persons. On 25 October 2006, I advocated for greater attention to economic, social and cultural rights in transitional justice processes in a lecture on "economic and social justice for societies in transition". I shall follow up on this initiative with an expert meeting on this issue in the autumn of 2007.

52. Lastly, I should like to emphasize that my Office remains committed to supporting the drafting of an optional protocol to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

D. The rights of persons with disabilities

53. This year has been a momentous one for the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities. The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol thereto were opened for signature on 30 March 2007. The Convention and its Optional Protocol have received, to date, 100 and 55 signatures respectively. My Office has been working to encourage States to ratify and implement the instrument, to raise awareness about the Convention at the international, national and regional levels, and to assist States, upon request, in relation to the Convention. OHCHR is also strengthening its partnerships with persons with disabilities and their representative organizations. On 16 July, I sent a statement of support to the World Congress of the World Federation of the Deaf, and my Deputy will attend the Seventh World Assembly of Disabled Persons International from 5 to 8 September 2007. The Office has also cooperated closely with States Parties to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-personnel Mines and on Their Destruction,

illustrating ways in which the Convention can assist States in providing guidance to victims of landmines.

E. Women's rights

54. OHCHR has now established a Women's Human Rights and Gender Unit whose principal task is to ensure that a gender perspective is fully reflected in all OHCHR programmes and the United Nations human rights machinery. The unit has commenced work on non-discrimination in the administration of justice, starting with the gender dimensions of the prosecution of violence and the need to secure social and economic rights as a precursor to participation in such proceedings and as indispensable to development. The effectiveness of the existing mechanisms to identify and address de jure discrimination is also being examined. Assistance is being provided to target groups in the form of thematic expertise in such areas as legal reform, land rights and gender, and maternal mortality as an outcome of violence.

55. OHCHR has contributed to the work of the Inter-Agency Network on Women and Gender Equality and supported work relating to the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2005) on women and peace and security. OHCHR also participates in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Action and has been actively engaged in the development of the gender capacity standby project (GENCAP), providing support and training to persons recruited to the roster of gender advisers who can be deployed to United Nations humanitarian operations at short notice.

56. OHCHR has continued to work bilaterally with a number of United Nations partners, including the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and WHO. Through the Gender Adviser at its New York Office, OHCHR has continued to participate in a range of activities of the Division for the Advancement of Women under the annual joint workplan submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women and the Human Rights Council.

F. Indigenous peoples

57. OHCHR has continued to work to strengthen the capacity of United Nations agencies and programmes and other multilateral organizations to integrate indigenous issues into their programming. OHCHR is a leading participant in inter-agency efforts to promote indigenous rights throughout the United Nations, including the Inter-Agency Support Group on Indigenous Issues. The Inter-Agency Support Group has invited OHCHR, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), to develop the first outline of a set of guidelines on integrating indigenous issues into country programmes. Under the Andean Project for the promotion and protection of indigenous peoples and Afro-descendants' rights, activities have been developed in Ecuador and Bolivia with the aim of bringing on indigenous peoples and persons of African descent into sharper focus in the United Nations country programming, including through joint work with UNDP. Jointly with UN-Habitat, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

(ECLAC), the International Organization for Migration and the secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, OHCHR organized the first International Expert Group Meeting on Urban Indigenous Peoples and Migration, in Santiago from 27 to 29 March 2007.

58. In 2007, 19 indigenous representatives took part in the OHCHR Indigenous Fellowship Programme, organized into four language components (English, French, Spanish and Russian). The Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations also enabled 68 indigenous representatives to attend the annual session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Populations.

G. Minorities

59. There remain significant challenges to ensuring that minority concerns are integrated into efforts of the United Nations to reduce poverty, promote stable and socially inclusive societies and address systematic and long-standing discrimination against specific minority communities. My Office is contributing to meeting these challenges through a strategy focused on rights-holders' empowerment, as well as on mainstreaming minority issues throughout the United Nations system. Twenty-five minority fellows have participated in the Minority Fellowship Programme since it was initiated by OHCHR in 2005.

60. At the inter-agency level, my Office has organized a number of consultations with United Nations agencies and programmes to exchange information on developments and activities relating to minorities in the United Nations system and to discuss ways of strengthening implementation of article 9 of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, which calls for the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system to contribute to the full realization of the rights and principles set forth in the Declaration. An initial consultation was organized by UNDP in cooperation with OHCHR and the independent expert on minority issues to consider the question of engaging with minorities in development processes. In the conclusions and recommendations stemming from this meeting, steps were outlined for the possible future incorporation of minority issues in the work of UNDP on democratic governance, social inclusion, conflict prevention and resolution, and civil society partnerships.

H. Issues of migration and trafficking

61. As I have stressed in a variety of forums, I believe that human rights are at the heart of the migration of people and should be at the forefront of any discussion on migration and development. The new global process designed to enhance the positive impact of migration on development (and vice versa) requires this to be recognized. In particular, attention should be given to reducing and eliminating the harm and risks migrants encounter in the course of migration, particularly migrants in especially risk-prone situations. Since a large number of recent migrants are women and young people, special attention should be given to these groups, which often have specific realities and needs. States must be discouraged from stigmatizing and criminalizing migrants and must promote effective implementation of all international instruments and norms relating to migration, including the

International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

62. The complex dimensions of human trafficking, including its connections with migration, development, access to justice and prevention, have been the focus of the anti-trafficking programme of my Office over the past year. The protection and empowerment of trafficked persons and those vulnerable to trafficking are the key objectives which drive OHCHR anti-trafficking initiatives. The prevention of trafficking involves addressing its root causes, including the development deficit, the denial of fundamental human rights, forced labour and discrimination. Protection from trafficking entails strengthening legal and policy initiatives, the rule of law and access to justice, as well as skills training and reintegration schemes that provide assistance to and protect the victims of trafficking.

63. My Office continues to forge partnerships with other United Nations agencies and international and civil society organizations to encourage the integration of human rights into migration policies and initiatives to fight human trafficking. OHCHR acts as convenor of the Steering Committee of the Global Campaign for the Promotion of the Ratification of the Migrant Workers Convention and is a member of the Global Migration Group and of the recently constituted steering committee of the Global Initiative to Fight Trafficking managed by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. It is also a partner of the Alliance Against Trafficking in Persons led by the Special Representative and Coordinator of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, and continues to coordinate the Intergovernmental Contact Group on Human Trafficking and Migrants. Lastly, OHCHR continues to work collaboratively with the International Coordinating Committee of National Institutions to develop and strengthen cooperation between national human rights institutions with regard to migration and human rights issues.

I. Rule of law and democracy

64. In his report to the General Assembly and the Security Council entitled "Uniting our strengths: enhancing United Nations support for the rule of law" (A/61/636-S/2006/980 and Corr.1), the Secretary-General recognized the need for the Organization to deepen and rationalize its rule of law work, strengthen its capacities, enhance its institutional memory and coordinate more effectively within the United Nations and with outside actors. To achieve these objectives, a division of labour was established among the key United Nations actors. OHCHR was designated to lead the United Nations system in a number of areas, notably advocacy, training and education on international human rights law; general transitional justice issues in post-conflict societies including human rights investigations; the establishment of national institutions; and monitoring and integrating human rights during post-conflict and development phases.

65. OHCHR plans to discharge its responsibilities at the global and country levels through further delineating United Nations capacities and gaps in the above-mentioned areas, identifying United Nations and non-United Nations actors and subjects for coordination, defining existing or new mechanisms for coordination, compiling minimum standards, good practices, lessons learned, methodology and

guidance, developing a training strategy for the sector and maintaining a repertoire of substantive United Nations guidance.

66. OHCHR also continues to assist transitional justice processes in many countries and to raise awareness regarding its four pillars: prosecution, truth-seeking, reparations and institutional reform. In 2007, OHCHR organized a series of seminars and workshops in this regard. They included an event on transitional justice mechanisms in Sarajevo, a workshop on police vetting in post-conflict States in Geneva and an expert meeting on human rights and traditional and informal justice systems in Africa, in Windhoek, with a special focus on the right to fair trial and equality.

67. A continuing challenge during the reporting period has been respect for human rights while countering terrorism. OHCHR continued to contribute to the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Plan of Action. OHCHR is an active participant in the Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force established by the Secretary-General and leads its working group on protecting human rights while countering terrorism.

J. Human rights responsibilities of business; the Global Compact

68. OHCHR continues to be engaged with the Global Compact. I participated in the Global Compact Leaders Summit in July 2007, during which OHCHR launched a web-based learning tool for companies on human rights, developed in collaboration with the Global Compact Office and the United Nations System Staff College. My Office also continues to participate in the governance of the initiative through the Global Compact Inter-Agency Team and plans to contribute actively to the work of the newly established human rights working group of the Global Compact Board. On 16 February 2007, I convened, pursuant to Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/69, a sector-specific meeting with senior executives and experts from the financial sector and from non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

69. OHCHR has also continued to assist the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. OHCHR support to the work of the Special Representative included coordinating research into the duties of States under international human rights law to regulate and adjudicate corporate acts with regard to human rights.

K. Human rights education

70. In coordinating the World Programme for Human Rights Education, proclaimed by the General Assembly in December 2004, I have focused on encouraging and assisting national implementation. Working jointly with other relevant actors, OHCHR has collected and disseminated good practices in the area of human rights education in the school system. These practices, such as legislation promoting human rights education, human rights training programmes for teachers or educational materials, are highlighted in my report (A/HRC/4/85) to the Human Rights Council on the subject.

Chapter V

Support for standard-setting instruments and treaty body reform

A. Support for standard-setting instruments

71. My Office continues to give substantive and technical support to the increasing activities of the treaty bodies. The work in this area will be expanded with the transfer to OHCHR of the servicing of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in January 2008.

72. The Subcommittee for the Prevention of Torture, whose members are nominated by the States parties to the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, met in February and June 2007. The Subcommittee is mandated to conduct visits, as a preventive tool, to places in States parties where persons are deprived of their liberty and to advise and assist States parties in the establishment and strengthening of national preventive mechanisms, as well as to advise and assist these mechanisms. The combination of international and national preventive visits strongly emphasizes national action as a means of securing the full enjoyment of human rights for all, an approach I strongly welcome.

73. On 20 December 2006, the General Assembly adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (resolution 61/177, annex). The Convention was opened for signature in Paris on 6 February 2007. This important new legal instrument closes gaps in international human rights law by making explicit the prohibition of enforced disappearance. A Committee on Enforced Disappearances is to monitor the implementation of the Convention. Some of the procedures provided for, such as the reporting procedure and the individual and inter-State complaint procedure, are similar to those already established for other human rights treaty bodies. The new Committee will also be able to receive requests for urgent action on individual cases, to conduct visits with the agreement of States parties concerned and, if it receives well-founded indications that enforced disappearance is being practised on a widespread or systematic basis on a territory under the jurisdiction of a State party, to urgently bring the matter to the attention of the General Assembly.

74. Lastly, my Office looks forward to supporting and servicing the work of the new Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to be established under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (see para. 53 above).

75. I am pleased to note that these three new instruments, while building upon the experience of the existing mechanisms, will also set up new procedures and working methods, opening up new opportunities and equipping the treaty bodies system with tools. This approach is fully in line with my previous recommendations on strengthening the link between deliberations at the international level and implementation at the national level.

B. Treaty body reform

76. I have continued to receive feedback on my proposal for the creation of a unified standing treaty body which would take on the functions of the eight existing human rights treaty bodies and of those which will be established when the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance enter into force.

77. Some treaty body members have welcomed this proposal, while others have opposed it, mostly on the basis that a unified standing body could undermine the specificity of the eight major human rights instruments. A similar division of opinion on my proposal exists among States and in the NGO community.

78. In the light of the above, it appears that the proposal for a unified standing treaty body that would unify both reporting and complaints procedures may not be achievable in the short term. However, there is broad support from all stakeholders for improvements to the treaty body system which would simplify procedures and make it more accessible and visible.

79. In 2007, OHCHR has continued to canvass views on proposals for reform of the treaty body system and has provided an updated compilation of these views on its website. It has also continued to organize and participate in consultations on all proposals on reform.

80. Emphasis has been placed on simplification of the reporting procedures of the treaty bodies and harmonization of their working methods. The sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies approved a note verbale recommending that States parties use the guidelines for the common core document when preparing their reports for submission to any of the human rights treaty bodies. The treaty bodies have begun to harmonize their treaty-specific guidelines with the guidelines for the common core document, and several include recommendations in their concluding observations that States parties implement these guidelines. Many States parties have received training on the common core document and others have expressed interest in receiving such training.

81. A working group on the harmonization of working methods of the human rights treaty bodies reported to the sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies. The inter-committee meeting recommended that it should convene twice annually, with the participation of the chairpersons of the treaty bodies, so that it could, inter alia, make recommendations for the improvement and harmonization of treaty body working methods. The recommendations, as usual, will be adopted in consultation and with the approval of all the human rights treaty bodies. Areas to be considered include national human rights institution and non-governmental organization participation in the treaty body system, relationships with specialized agencies, funds and programmes, and working methods with respect to reports and communications. The recommendations of the working group on reservations, elaborating a consistent approach of treaty bodies to this issue, were also endorsed by the sixth inter-committee meeting and the nineteenth meeting of chairpersons of the human rights treaty bodies.

Chapter VI
Support for special procedures

82. Between September 2006 and June 2007, special procedures mandate holders undertook some 50 country visits and submitted over 100 reports to the Human Rights Council at its fourth and fifth sessions. They issued over 60 press releases drawing attention to issues of concern within their mandates. In addition, mandate holders have continued to coordinate their work and increase cooperation among themselves. Over 50 per cent of all communications sent to Governments by mandate holders during this period were joint communications. The group of experts on the situation of human rights on Darfur, established by the Human Rights Council in its resolution HRC/4/8 and consisting of six special procedures mandate holders, undertook two consultations and submitted a report to the Council at its fifth session (A/HRC/5/6) prioritizing recommendations for action by the Government of the Sudan to address the situation in Darfur. The Council welcomed the report and requested that the group of experts continue its work for another six months. Several mandate holders have also envisaged joint missions in the near future.

83. My Office's support to the review process of the Human Rights Council forms part of larger efforts to ensure stronger coordination of the special procedures and to enhance the impact of their work. Besides ensuring the systematic participation of, and contributions from, mandate holders in the formal review process, my Office has also supported measures to ensure the maximum efficiency of the system. Internal guidelines have been developed to harmonize methods of work and there have been increased consultations within OHCHR and other United Nations agencies to ensure that the work of the special procedures is fully integrated into United Nations programmes. Mandate holders collected comments on their draft revised manual and are now working to integrate these comments into a revised version of the Manual, while taking account of the provisions of the newly adopted Code of Conduct for Special Procedures Mandate Holders of the Human Rights Council.[2] OHCHR continues to produce various information tools to raise awareness about the work of the special procedures. My Office is examining the relationship between the special procedures and civil society actors, with a view to facilitating the strengthening of their partnership.

[2] A/HRC/5/21, resolution 5/2, annex.

Chapter VII
Conclusion

84. In the present report I have sought to inform the General Assembly of the progress made over the past year in implementing the Plan of Action and the Strategic Management Plan (2006-2007) of my Office. I call upon all members of the Assembly to join us in our efforts over the coming years to become stronger and better equipped, so that we are fully able to meet the human rights needs of States, institutional partners and civil society, but first and foremost those of the rights holders, in particular victims of human rights violations everywhere.

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